

The Mind's Eye

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The Mind's Eye welcomes contributions. Your research, comment, reflections, reviews, letters, poetry, fiction are invited.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF PUBLIC OFFICE

by Richard C. Lamb

Editor's note: Richard C. Lamb is the youngest mayor in the history of North Adams. The Mind's Eye invited him to describe his initial feelings as chief executive of the city.

It is different than it seems--this job of being mayor. There clearly is less glamor and more work, fewer far-reaching decisions, more attention to detail.

It is interesting and challenging, sometimes frustrating, usually fun, but always unpredictable. That unpredictability, the subtle element of surprise, surfaces constantly and produces the ultimate fascination of the job. Industrial development, downtown revitalization, and the budget appear initially as the central issues; but, comes a winter storm, and all else pales to insignificance before the all-encompassing concern for snow removal. Legions of phone calls, finally reducing to lectures on civic responsibilities, fail to produce a chairman for the Traffic Commission; but the office is barraged with applications for the dog officer's position.

Lessons in the unpredictable are coupled with less palatable exercises in bureaucracy. Government takes time--it's axiomatic, and everyone knows it. It doesn't make it any easier to take.

A new half-million-dollar shredder at the landfill is ready to go on line, but start-up is threatened by the injured cries of a state environmental control agency. The mayor dutifully responds that project approval was won only after an environmental review so exhaustive that it did everything but count the barn swallows. His protests are in vain. They lead only to ominous talk of "taking it to the Attorney General." So turns the bureaucratic wheel.

Criticism abounds, but it is tinged with

humor and loaded with irony. A walk down Main Street to a midafternoon negotiating session at the School Department elicits a passing comment, "Nice hours if you can get them." In contrast, working late with light burning for all to see seems admirable enough, but the interpretation is not so kind: "The kid can't handle it. He's back every night catching up."

Two campaign supporters are appointed to a prestigious committee of nine, and cries of patronage and political payoff resound. One loyal follower remains without a post and complains bitterly about the sin of forgetting old friends in a hurry.

Failure to upbraid publicly a department head for speaking out against an administration position leads to charges of weak leadership. Mere mention, politely phrased, of the possibility of a merger with a neighboring town produces instant murmurs of Napoleonic dictatorship.

At times, it seems hard to win.

What then does a new mayor learn in two months on the job? He learns to sign his name with a new-found flare--partly because he does it so often and partly to conceal the rather indicting fact that he is not always sure what he is signing. He learns, very quickly, to say no. He develops a new sense of humility. If he doesn't, he should--because he is reminded of the propriety of same every day by many people in many ways.

The much acclaimed "perks" of office are few in number and lacking in any real appeal. The highly touted honeymoon period is an absolute fallacy. Notes of congratulation devolve quickly into sarcastic, stinging diatribes. The job is tough and perplexing, demanding and thankless.

This new mayor loves every minute of it.

The Editor's FileHUNTING: ANOTHER VIEW

by Charles A. McIsaac

Behind our house fifty acres of pasture slope gently up to the woods where deer live. For fifty weeks of the year it is a peaceable place. The foxes and hawks go about their timeless task of controlling the mouse population, as does our cat, who thinks the meadow belongs to him--or did, until the fox chased him out of there one day. In spring and summer evenings the deer come out to feed, staying well away from the house until after dark; in fall nights they jump the fence to eat apples in our yard. Startled by headlights turning into the driveway, they take off in great bounds, white tails flying. They are an elegant, comforting presence.

Then comes November and hunting season. On its first day, 1977, I sat at the breakfast table reading, "unhearing" the flat splatting of rifle fire (gunshots don't ring), telling myself that only one hunter in ten gets "his" deer and that the herd is too large anyhow and needs to be thinned out for its own good. Not enough food to go around. Suddenly there was a shot which, it too slowly dawned on me, was closer than the others. I looked out the window. A hundred yards above the house stood two orange-suited hunters. Directly between me and them, not thirty feet from the fence was a wounded deer, all his grace and glory gone, almost slinking--if you can imagine a deer slinking--toward death. More shots came from the orange suits. The deer hobbled an agonizing hundred yards before one put him down, with a repulsive convulsion, by the brook from which he had daily drunk. Not dead yet, head up, he gazed around seeming to wonder. Barbara wept; I choked back an angry lump of rage and sorrow. Two more slugs, sending up sprays from the damp ground, ricocheted across the well-traveled road. The third entered the lovely head, and the deer was gone from this world. The men in orange had their buck; it had required ten shots: two

crippling, one fatal, seven wild. Not to mention how many were wasted running the deer out of the woods and a quarter of a mile down the pasture, for it turned out that there were not two orange suits but four.

The image of that noble animal's submitting to insult would not leave me for weeks, evoking a pain of outrage and helpless pity in my heart. Time heals all wounds, but the scar tissue from this one will remain, a permanent memento of brutishness.

What is hunting? For some it is a necessary annual rite, a mystical experience, a democracy of all manner of men from statesmen to mechanics ineluctably drawn to a pursuit as old as mankind. Each fall, their employers suffer their week's absence in sympathetic silence.

For others, hunters whose families struggle in modest circumstances, the animal's meat is a necessity of life; and they should have a longer season. Several hundred dollars' worth of venison is not only a boon to their tables but makes a difference in the clothing and education of their children. But what Solomon will judge who is needful and who is not?

In the case of far too many more, hunting is a week's macho bash for Clockwork Orange invaders, beer can litterers, shoot-at-anything-that-moves nuts--killers of cows, pets, and people--trigger-happy Americans, seven-day lords of the world. What will conscientious hunters do about them? What can they do? They are outnumbered.

It is a fact of history that hunters--Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot preeminent among them--were prime movers in the conservation movement. Hunters

were instrumental in the founding of the National Audubon Society, the National Wildlife Federation, and the Nature Conservancy. In recent years, pressure from sports fishermen has been a principal cause of the cleanup of some Midwest waterways, including parts of badly polluted Lake Michigan. Nevertheless, times have changed, and the conservation ethic has moved from game-species preservation to an ecosystem orientation. This is a new ball game based on scientific principles only dimly recognized at the beginning of the century. The degeneration of recreational hunting into a shoot-'em-up ethos has brought the whole hunting community into conflict with a growing social discernment that not only is it morally wrong to slaughter animals for pleasure, but that indiscriminate killing (vide the eagle, falcon, wolf, coyote, whale, dolphin) upsets the balance of nature and, in any case, is a rupture of the solidarity of earthly species of which man is a member. Subsistence hunting remains a necessity in certain places and circumstances, as does the rare instance of self-defense. Apart from these, satisfaction of the urge to kill a lesser being runs counter to a new conservation ethic. Man, the most highly evolved of earth's creatures, must take responsibility for the welfare of all his brothers, lest his own technological achievements wipe them from the face of the earth, leaving the planet untenable as a place to live.

Michael Haines, whose article "On Hunting" in the October/November Mind's Eye inspired the editor's disparate view, replies.

After describing a particularly brutal death (in World War I), Wilfred Owen quotes Horace's "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" (it is sweet and becoming to die for one's country), which he calls "the Old Lie." Owen was not unpatriotic: he went on to give up his own life for his country. His point was, simply, that death is not sweet and becoming.

And that would be the first point I would make in response to Charles McIsaac: death is not pretty--ever. Some may be less brutal than others, and slobs like McIsaac's orange-suited monsters can, in their incompetence, make death especially ugly. But I wonder--how many would continue to eat hamburger if they witnessed a steer's death in a slaughterhouse?

Besides, that deer which died so brutally before the angry eyes of McIsaac and the weeping eyes of his wife did have a chance. How much chance did the steer have? From the moment he was born he was destined for the table--never allowed the privilege of roaming free, never being given an opportunity to escape the inevitable, and suffering the final indignity of being crowded into a feeder lot to be fattened before entering the chute.

Who, I would ask, is the more brutal, the more callous--the man who accepts the predator niche evolution has carved out for him, who recognizes his place at the end of the food chain, who kills his own meat? or is it the man who, like Pilate, washes his hands and lets the slaughterhouse do his killing for him and thereby claims no responsibility, claims a specious moral superiority?

Before we leave the subject of brutal deaths, let me suggest that those who think the downing of a deer by a rifle is ugly should see a deer who has starved because the food supply was insufficient to support a herd whose ranks were not thinned by hunters. Or, a deer so weakened by hunger that he could not escape the dogs of those unthinking people who refuse to restrain their animals. Or, a deer torn apart on a highway because hunger forced him nearer to danger than he would customarily go. And it is the concern McIsaac mentioned for a balanced ecosystem that makes us so aware of the utter necessity for hunting in an ecology without other predators.

But, I will concede, there are slobs in the sport--as there are slobs everywhere (I would not argue for the elimination of

sex because there are rapists, pornographers, and insensitive bed-hoppers), and no one hates the slob hunter more than the hunter who loves his sport. Finally, though it might be hard for nonhunters to understand, there are few who love game animals more than those who hunt them: the kill is not without its twinges of remorse, its ambivalences. Perhaps the attitude is best expressed by a prayer addressed by an Indian hunter to his kill:

I am sorry I had to kill thee, Little Brother.
 But I had need of thy meat. . . .
 I will do honor to thy courage, thy strength, and thy beauty.
 See, I will hang thy horns upon this tree. . . .
 Each time I pass, I will remember thee and do honor to thy spirit.
 I am sorry I had to kill thee.
 Forgive me, Little Brother. . . .

HEATING UP WITH CARBON DIOXIDE

Carbon dioxide is a trace atmospheric gas whose importance is twofold: as a regulator (by trapping the sun's energy) of the earth's temperature and as the basis (by photosynthesis) of all terrestrial life.

One of its sources is the combustion of fossil fuels. In the energy debate, warnings frequently appear that use of coal will put too much carbon dioxide into the air, disrupting the climate by raising the earth's temperature. The actual case may be even worse. Fossil fuel burning gives only half of carbon dioxide production. The other half comes chiefly from the forests of the world which, instead of being sinks for CO₂, are now known to be net producers. And they are increasing in output as we cut them down for agriculture, industry, and housing. By the year 2020 the air's content of CO₂ will have doubled and we may very well be facing catastrophic climatic and social changes.

The problem is explained by George M. Woodwell in "The Carbon Dioxide Question," (Scientific American, January).

--CAM

FREEDOM AND THE WILL

by Samuel H. Clarke

Editor's note: During Winter Study, 1978, a lecture series, "The Idea of Freedom," was presented weekly. Professor Clarke here records some thoughts on the psychological meaning of human freedom.

Gordon Liddy is said to have demonstrated his personal freedom for action by keeping his fingers in a flame. While most of us would hesitate to hold a candle to this kind of achievement, we are conscious of human ability to act in ways contrary to the immediate reinforcements and punishments that would otherwise control our behavior. Recognition of this ability tempts us to put the matter of personal choice beyond the reach of a strict scientific determinism. On the other hand, a belief in Darwinian evolution causes us to look for its explanation in the continuum of species.

A good place to start is the relatively recent work on language learning with chimpanzees begun in 1966 by Allen and Beatrice Gardner. Aware of previous failures to teach chimps a vocal language, the Gardners trained their first animal, Washoe, to use the American Sign Language. Basic signs in this language are called cheremes and are analogous to phonemes in spoken language. Some of these cheremes are associated with configurations of the hands, others with the place relative to the rest of the body that a sign is made, and still others with movements of the hands.

Washoe and the other chimps who soon joined in this research proved to be remarkably adept students. Although many raisins were needed to keep motivation levels high at the beginning, a gradually increasing requirement that the chimps sign for goals important to themselves (getting various kinds of food, being tickled, etc.) resulted in the language becoming an important part of their behavioral repertoires. New signs came to be learned through imitation; pairs

and triplets of signs were put together in novel combinations. Lucy coined the expressions "cry-hurt-food" for radishes and "drink-fruit" for watermelons.

Not only did the chimps learn both to give and to follow instructions; they spontaneously learned to combine these abilities in the control of their own behavior. Washoe is in a room by herself. Before her on the floor lies, upside down, a Bella Abzug hat. The chimp signs to herself, "Washoe-in-hat." She then dives head first into the crown of the hat. Thus an even artificially acquired capacity for language takes some control over behavior.

The human capacity for self-control is also a consequence of language learning. As neurologically normal children, we sooner or later learned to follow verbal instructions. Soon after, we extended this knowledge to the use of instructions as a means of controlling the behavior of others. Once acquired, these two abilities combine in the control of our own behavior.

Our consciousness of having the capacity for this kind of control is the basis for our sense of having a personal will. That it functions as well as it does in the face of adverse contingencies makes it easy to believe that one's will is somehow free. This apparent freedom is probably the result of culturally controlled child rearing practices. Supported by religious and other institutions, parents at least partially convince their children that someone (God, Santa Claus, et al.) knows every thought. Good thoughts, more or less clearly identified, are carefully associated with real and imagined rewards; evil thoughts are conversely associated with punishments--sometimes eternal. Fortunately, as children mature, moral imperatives based on magical thinking slowly give way to ethical considerations based on conceptual knowledge regarding long-term consequences of behavior. Smoking stops being something you just don't do and becomes something that gives you lung cancer. The outcome is the emergence of two

relatively independent and often conflicting kinds of behavioral control. There is the control, which we share with other animals, imposed on behavior by its immediate consequences. And there is the kind of control which results from the moral conditioning of a personal will. The existence of this will and our relative freedom from the otherwise absolute tyranny of immediate behavioral consequences is based on the cultural development of our biological capacity for language. Nowhere is there an inescapable affront to the principle of scientific determinism.

THE STUDY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION
IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

by John T. McNulty

No man can have a significant impact on his own age, be it at the level of the community or on the larger stages of state and nation, who does not possess informed beliefs and convictions, for without them he will neither initiate nor support causes for the betterment of society.

If his convictions are founded upon misconceptions, half-truths, or a narrow view of reality, the impact of the individual will be more often harmful than beneficial. We are all aware that some of humanity's greatest crimes have been committed by well-meaning people of deep convictions who were lacking in that breadth of knowledge and its products, understanding and wisdom, which might have tempered their actions.

To lay the foundation of the kind of knowledge I have in mind is, I believe, the ultimate purpose of a general education curriculum. Convictions are a necessity if we are to live a purposive life, one with meaning for ourselves and value for society. But those convictions must be based upon truth; and truth is a lifelong quest--one not achieved alone by the bachelor's degree or the master's, or even that of the doctor. However, the formal studies undertaken in pursuit of such degrees are the high road to a broad,

THE SENSES OF CHILDHOOD

Touch

Goose pimple cold
of moist green garden snakes
before they crumple and dash.

Scent

April rain
saturating garments
in creaking cloakrooms.

Taste

The piercing palate chill
of maple nut cream
gobbled too soon.

Sight

July elongated
rustic roads
converging
in forest distance
at a green pool
with diving board.

Sound

Angelus bells
bidding holy pauses
in the noontime hush
of locust days.

--Arnold Bartini

wide-ranging knowledge and the creating of a mind that is open to truth. It is fundamental that the truly educated man so respects truth that he will admit of no compromise, no matter how unwelcome truth may be.

This is obviously a tremendously high goal and one which I am not satisfied can be fully realized without a significant degree of spiritual motivation. In any event, educators have no choice but to push towards it with all the resources at their command.

No means to this end is more important than the study of Western civilization. It gives the inquirer a general view of the basic ideas and values which underlie the way of life he has inherited, and a comprehension of the great influences which have changed the course of history, his history: the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the scientific revolution, the ideological movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Without knowledge of this background, how can he judge the events of his own time with perspective and wisdom?

Beyond this, the course in Western Civilization reveals great men achieving, likewise failing--and often succeeding in the wake of failure. It provides the student with examples drawn from life of injustice, bigotry, and fanaticism as it endows him with the historical insight to analyze their tragic consequences. He learns from contemplation of the Western tradition that progress in human affairs is generally, often agonizingly, slow. He comes to know that, although the world cannot be changed overnight, men of courage and good will have made lasting contributions to the welfare of their fellows.

In a word, the study of Western man's struggle to attain a truly human way of life is a fount of wisdom which it is insane to overlook in the training of young people.

Yet, as indicated above, no single course, nor even an entire curriculum, can produce of itself a balanced, rational, enlightened human being. I hold such a one to be, rather, the living issue of years of study--either formal or informal--integrated with experience, and the whole

reflected upon. I would be surprised to see this blessed state achieved before age forty, or even fifty, for man's passions can be kept from clouding his reason only after years of unremitting effort.

But the process has to begin somewhere, and I contend that at the college level it best begins with the study of Western experience, wherein are found the dominating influences and pivotal events which have given shape to modern life. Only in this context may all that is learned in other disciplines be understood and integrated.

This last is primary. Unless knowledge and experience harmonize in the life of reason and cumulate into a compelling vision of truth and certitude, the educated man cannot act with a sense of conviction in support of positions and causes which are difficult and often unpopular.

Let these reflections speak for the value of the study of Western civilization as a critical element in the general education curriculum from which a college student hopes to gain an understanding of the world in which he lives.

NEWSWEEK WATCH

Samples of Sarah Clarke's Newsweek Watch. The full version is at the library desk.

"Sadat in Israel." November 28, pp. 36-46. Cover story of the historic first official visit of an Arab leader to Israel since the birth of that nation in 1948. Subsequent coverage of the Mideast crisis:

December 5, pp. 24-34
 December 12, pp. 51-53
 December 19, pp. 20-22
 December 26, pp. 73-74
 January 2, pp. 12-14
 January 9, pp. 28-31
 January 16, pp. 40-47
 January 30, pp. 41-49
 February 13, pp. 37-40
 February 20, pp. 35-38

"Texas! The Superstate." September 12, pp. 36-46. After years of tall tales and crude excesses, the state of the Union (and acknowledged state of mind) called Texas has become an economic and cultural superstate.

"How Men Are Changing." January 16, pp. 52-61. The habits of male supremacy, although deeply ingrained in the macho image, are slowly giving way to a much fuller range of sensibilities.

"Hail and Farewell." January 23, pp. 16-24. The nation's tribute to Hubert H. Humphrey, dead of cancer at the age of 66.

"Lord of the Piano." January 23, pp. 62-68. In a golden age of young virtuoso pianists, 73-year-old Vladimir Horowitz maintains an unchallenged reputation as a master of musical nuance.

"Crisis in the Liberal Arts." February 6, pp. 69-70. Job-oriented education strips grads of ability for ordinary discourse.

Contributors

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Michael Haines, Assistant Professor of English, is a medievalist, freelance journalist, and outdoorsman.

Richard C. Lamb, Mayor of North Adams, is a 1971 graduate of Williams College, cum laude in history.

Charles A. McIsaac, Director of Library Services, pursues an avocational interest in problems of the environment.

John T. McNulty, Associate Professor of History, has a major commitment to the implications of the Western tradition.